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DE RUEHGB #3543 2982001  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
P 252001Z OCT 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4030  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T BAGHDAD 003543

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: BAGHDAD: EPRT SEEKS LINK TO SADR THROUGH LOCAL  
ENGAGEMENT IN SADR CITY

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Ellen Germain for reasons 1.4  
(b,d).

¶1. (S) On September 28, the EPRT and Brigade covering Baghdad's most populous district, Sadr City, met with local tribal leaders with close ties to representatives of Muqtadar Al-Sadr (MAS). Months of engagements designed to gain trust among less influential Sadr City leaders culminated in a series of meetings since late September with senior tribal sheikhs, civic leaders and the representatives of two key leaders in Sadr City: Salman al Faraji, director of the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) in Sadr City, and Raheem al Alak, a senior representative of MAS to the tribal sheikhs of Sadr City. The EPRT and Brigade aim through these engagements to establish ties with senior leaders in Sadr City, such as al Faraji, who can help the Government of Iraq (GoI) and Coalition Forces (CF) improve governance and security in the district. The EPRT has sought out key leaders who have strong ties to the three power centers that matter most in Sadr City: MAS (through his representatives and his office); informal leadership structures (such as tribes); and formal governance institutions (District and Neighborhood Councils, Directors General, Qaim Makams).

¶2. (S) If engagements with key leaders succeed, the EPRT and Brigade aim, more broadly, to forge a better working relationship with Sadrists in the movement's Baghdad heartland - Sadr City - in order to press MAS and his movement toward more constructive and direct engagement with the USG. As a near-term tactic, the EPRT seeks to coax the leaders who represent al Faraji and Alak to begin meeting USG civilians in the open instead of in private, as they currently do. A public meeting between the USG and representatives truly associated with MAS and OMS would implicitly grant to non-Sadrists officials in Sadr City the political permission also to meet with USG officials. Without fear of reprisal from Jaysh Al-Mahdi (JAM), local council members and technocrats could begin cooperating with the EPRT and Brigade in the reconstruction of Sadr City.

¶3. (S) The process of identifying and engaging Sadr City's real power brokers has been excruciatingly slow and complex. The broader national context constrains the freedom of Sadr City's local leaders to engage with the USG, as they struggle to understand complicated and shifting Sadrists positions vis--vis the GOI, USG, Sunni groups, and other Shia movements. Local leaders also endure unpredictable eruptions of violence from JAM and the special groups and criminals who operate under the banner of JAM. Thus the Sadr City local engagement process remains vulnerable to any event that diminishes the political cover Sadr City leaders require to engage with the USG. The widely publicized October 21 raids by CF into Sadr City will likely slow but not stop the forward momentum built over the past six months.

¶4. (S) Three other specific, complicating factors may also impede progress in the coming weeks. Firstly, a General in the National Police who is directly associated with JAM

currently represents the Government of Iraq in the on-going engagements. Secondly, early discussions have been tempered by continued local anger over CF actions in Sadr City during April 2004. Finally, all of the Sadr City sheikhs who met with the EPRT and Brigade on September 28 made clear that they represent JAM (which, they claimed, "is made up of our brothers and sons"), and that they want CF night raids to stop and the Coalition to leave Iraq immediately. Despite these tensions, the EPRT and Brigade continue to develop relationships with Sadr City leaders who may provide the vital, direct link to MAS necessary to stabilize and develop one of Baghdad's most important and volatile areas.

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